

WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
RE RAISED BILL NO. 5541-AN ACT CONCERNING SERVICES PROVIDED BY DENTAL PROFESSIONALS AND
CERTIFICATION FOR DENTAL HYGIENE PRACTITIONERS
MARCH 21, 2012

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I submit this written testimony in support of Bill #5541 to establish an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practice degree program (a master's level degree). An Advanced Practice Dental Hygiene Program will serve to increase access to care for the State's most vulnerable and medically needy residents and increase capacity of oral health care providers to deliver care in a variety of dental practice settings. As the President/CEO of a large Federally Qualified Health Center in Bridgeport, CT, the oral health needs of our clients continue to grow with each passing year. The Health Center's capacity to service clients on a daily basis is dependent upon operatory space, number of practitioners, and the oral health needs of each client. In 2011, Southwest Community Health Center (Southwest) rendered 22,507 dental visits to 6,979 clients ranging in ages from 1 year to 75+ years. Southwest has two dental practice sites with 7 operatories at each site and employs 5.78 FTE dentists, 4.01 FTE dental hygienists, and 10.67 FTE Dental Assistants/Technicians. Southwest also provides oral health services in four of its six Bridgeport school-based health centers on a weekly basis. The practitioners at our two main sites deliver emergency care to walk-in clients as well as treat their own scheduled clients on a daily basis. Our dental practice hours include two evenings per week until 8:00 p.m. and Saturday mornings from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The complexity of oral health needs varies by client, but all clients need both preventive and restorative/rehabilitative dentistry.

In 2012 Southwest will open a new Health Center to replace its oldest site at 361 Bird St. The new site, located at 46 Albion St., is one block from Bird St. and will house an 11 operatory dental center, expanding our existing capacity by 57% . Additional dental practitioners will be needed to fully staff the new dental center. To render care to more clients each day, Southwest must incorporate more efficient and effective practice techniques. One strategy Southwest and other health centers could adopt would be to employ Advanced Practice Dental Hygienists. These practitioners, working in collaboration with dentists, would be able to perform an expanded range of palliative and therapeutic services, which, in turn, would allow the dentists to devote their clinical time to the treatment of more advanced restorative procedures.

I also support the strengthening of certification requirements in this bill for Dental Assistants and recognition of the enhanced role Dental Assistants could play in a practice setting working under the direct supervision of a dentist. Southwest employs Dental Assistants who have educational training, certification, and have passed radiation health and safety examinations. Southwest also employs Dental Technicians who learn on the job and did not have prior educational experience. Southwest mandates that all employees participate in an infection control program and I believe it is very important to have this requirement in the new bill. Expansion of duties performed by an Assistant would clearly help the dentists and allow more clients to be treated each day.

Southwest has a long history of collaboration with the Fones School of Dental Hygiene. Our Health Center has served as a dental hygiene practicum site for many years. The Fones School of Dental